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TAGS: PREL PGOV PINR PHUM SOCI BM KS KN  
SUBJECT: DFM LEE SAYS ROK WELCOMES NEW U.S. APPROACH ON  
BURMA

Classified By: DCM MARK A. TOKOLA. REASONS 1.4 (B/D)

¶1. (C) DCM delivered reftel points on December 1 to Deputy Foreign Minister Lee Young-joon, asking the ROK to urge the Burmese government to engage in serious dialogue with the opposition and allow ASSK to meet with the National League for Democracy's entire leadership council. DFM Lee said the ROKG welcomed the change in U.S. strategy on Burma. He related that Seoul had resumed high-level dialogue with Burma in January, when he led a delegation there to win the release of a small group of DPRK refugees and encourage the GOB to allow other North Korean refugees to regularly transit Burma. DFM Lee explained that, at that time, the GOB's "price" for such cooperation was the establishment of regular dialogue and policy consultations at the Deputy Foreign Minister level.

¶2. (C) During his January visit, Lee related that he stressed to all of his interlocutors the ROK's "strong hope" that Burma would choose the path of democratization. Lee noted the ROKG was deeply concerned about expanding military-to-military ties between the GOB and the DPRK. Burma had been purchasing small arms and ammunition from North Korea only because international sanctions prevented other countries from supplying such weapons. The result was that sanctions were having the ironic effect of strengthening the GOB's ties with Pyongyang -- a matter of great concern to Seoul. According to Lee, the ROK was considering ways to mitigate this trend and would be open to further discussions with the USG on the subject. In closing, the DFM said his Burmese interlocutors had expressed an irrational fear of attack by the United States, eerily echoing North Korean propaganda; "it was almost funny," he concluded.

STEPHENNS